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ABSTRACT

Ancient cultures believed the heart was the crossing point of passion and intellect, and modern scientists are realizing that the brain, heart, and immune systems are connected. The heart thinks, remembers, communicates, and contains stored information. Metaphors for the heart include sensitivity, compassion, sincerity, courage, respect, and support. Teaching and learning from the heart involves being genuinely human and using the full range of emotions and feelings. When teachers appear objective and emotionless, students become confused and alienated because their humanity is denied. Environmental and outdoor education have stressed the wholeness of knowledge and the person and have focused on the importance of social and emotional growth within each student. Historically, schools have honored only students' minds and bodies, not their souls and spirits. Good teachers are weavers of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students. The present climate of public education is determined not by teachers, but by corporate leaders and politicians, with an emphasis on testing, inflexible learning standards, prescribed textbooks, lockstep movement through an imposed curriculum, unresponsiveness to diverse learning styles, and other characteristics that do not respect learners. Outdoor educators can enlighten the public and lead the way to a saner way of teaching and learning by planning lessons directed to the students' hearts, where their intellect, feelings, body, and spirit converge. (Contains 19 references.) (TD)

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Teaching From The Heart: A Search For Meaning

A Speech Delivered At The Association For Environmental and Outdoor Education

April 8, 2000

Clifford E. Knapp, Northern Illinois University

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Teaching From The Heart: A Search For Meaning
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I'd like to think of this presentation as a collection of stories about teaching and learning from the heart. I'm reminded of what Badger said to Crow and Weasel in Barry Lopez's book, Crow and Weasel:

"I would ask you to remember only this one thing," said Badger. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. One day you will be good storytellers. Never forget these obligations." (Lopez, 1990, p. 48)

By telling these stories, I am nurturing myself because I want to share what I've learned about teaching and learning from the heart. I hope you view some of these stories as needed, maybe even more than food. Because you have invited me here, I want to tell you these stories in hopes that they will help you grow.

The theme of this conference is "Teaching From The Heart". The idea of combining the heart and teaching is very important to me as I approach retirement. Next year, I will have been teaching for 40 years. My first job was teaching high school students science in New Jersey. I don't know how much I understood about teaching from the heart then, but I tried. I have learned more about this topic along the way.

Let's think together about what it means to teach and learn from the heart. Think back during your schooling. Can you remember when you really felt seen or heard by a teacher? Where were you? What were you doing? What were you studying? How were you feeling? Did it help you to become a better person? How? Were you learning from the heart? Was the teacher teaching from the heart? I believe that before we can teach from the heart, we must have experienced learning from the heart. Perhaps teaching from the heart is a special way of perceiving, thinking, feeling, valuing, and acting. When I was in the sixth grade, my teacher wrote in my autograph book on the last day of class: "And still they gazed and still their wonder grew, that one small head could carry all he knew." Mrs. Nemec gave me the gift of support and increased my confidence in my ability to learn. I have always remembered that she

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respected me. She knew how to teach from the heart. Another teacher in the fifth grade took our class outside to plant trees. I also remember meeting a special girl friend for the first time during recess. When someone made fun of her accent, my heart went out to her and soon after, I developed a crush on her. That's about all I remember clearly from elementary school. I don't remember much about the formal lessons, but I learned that many of my teachers were caring persons. I retained what touched my emotions.

The image of the heart is a place to begin. Over the centuries this symbol has changed gradually from one of power over others to one of love and friendship. When early humans painted a heart on the cave walls, it probably indicated their desire to gain control over their enemies. Injury to the heart usually meant death. A healthy heart usually meant life. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians believed in three focal points of the human body: the brain, the heart, and the sexual organs. Because the heart was in the middle of the body, it was viewed as the crossing point of passion and intellect. Some thought that the heart was the seat of intelligence and the brain was simply an instrument of the heart (Bawden, 1992, p. 7). Others thought that the mind included not only the brain, but the heart, the liver, and other organs and that each had the capacity of intellect. In his book, The Heart's Code, Pearsall (1998, inside cover) wrote: ". . . the heart loves and feels, but did you know the heart also thinks, remembers, communicates with other hearts, and contains stored information that continually pulses through your body?" More and more scientists are realizing that the brain and heart and immune systems are connected. (Goleman, 1995 , p. 168) Maybe we are just returning to a very old idea that intelligence extends beyond the brain. "In ancient India, it was supposed that intelligence existed everywhere; it was called Brahman, from the Sanskrit word for 'big', and was just like an invisible field." (Chopra, 1989, p. 110) Both the Bible's Old and New Testaments mention the heart as involving intellect, will, intention, and feeling -- the kind of knowledge that influences the daily, habitual practices of life. This notion of "habits of the heart" can be traced to early Christianity, as well as Confucianism, and Buddhism (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 312). Joseph Campbell in his "The Power of Myth" video series also traces the use of the word heart to ancient times. He defined heart as "the organ of opening up to someone else" or compassion for others (Campbell, 1988). More recently, Howard Gardner, who recently named the eighth intelligence -- the naturalist, recognized an expanded understanding of the mind as ". . . equally within the skull, in the objects strewn about in the culture, and in the behaviors of other individuals with whom one interacts and from whom one learns." (1991, p. 40)

In The Wizard of Oz, the Scarecrow and Tinman had a conversation:

"I don't know enough," replied the Scarecrow cheerfully. "My heart is stuffed with straw, you know, and that is why I am going to Oz to ask him for some brains." "Oh, I see, " said the Tin Woodsman," But after all, brains are not the best things in the world." "Have you any?' inquired the Scarecrow. "No, my head is quite empty," replied the Tin Woodsman, "but once I had brains and a heart also; so having tried them both, I should rather have a heart." (source unknown)

I wonder if we can learn how to use both our brain and our heart? I think so. Because I have a love affair with words, I went searching for the different meanings of the word "heart". Most of the time, it is used as a metaphor. What is a metaphor? The original root, "meta" means "in the middle of" and "phor" means "to bring forth" or "to carry". A metaphor is a word "in the middle of bringing forth or carrying" something to help us get where we want to go. Where do those who use the heart metaphor want to go? What do they really mean?

1. When we show heart or never lose heart, we are courageous and when we are fainthearted, we are afraid.
2. When a meal is hearty, it is nurturing.
3. When we wear our heart on our sleeve, we are sensitive.
4. Leaders with heart are compassionate.
5. When we convey our heart-felt greeting or have a heart-to-heart talk or speak from the bottom of our heart, we are sincere and respectful.
6. When we give people our hearty endorsement, we provide them with our unqualified support.
7. If we win someone's heart or we become their heartthrob, we gain their love.
8. If we point to the heartwood of a tree or come from theheartland of a region, we are acknowledging its central location or importance.
9. If we feel light hearted, we are happy or if we're heartened, we are encouraged.
10. If we accept a task wholeheartedly, we do it enthusiastically.
11. If a song tugs at our heartstrings, we feel deep emotion.
12. If we have a "heart of gold", we are kind and considerate.

Does teaching and learning from the heart mean that we should practice all of these "heart qualities? Should we teach courageously and nurture others? Should we be sensitive, compassionate, sincere, and respectful to the needs and interests of our students? Should we give our students our unqualified support in order to gain their love? Should we recognize our students as central and important in the teaching process? Should we approach our jobs as happy and encouraged

people and teach with deep emotion and be kind and considerate? Perhaps it includes all of these things and more. That is why teaching and learning from the heart is a life-long journey. Our journey begins with our basic definition and philosophy of education. Jerold Apps, author of Teaching From The Heart, writes: "I believe education is a series of relationships: learners relating to their own intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual selves; teachers relating to learners; learners relating to each other; learners relating to knowledge; and teachers and learners relating to contexts and communities." (1996, p. 9)

Ed Young wrote a children's book, Voices of the Heart (1997), in which he selected 26 Chinese characters, each containing the symbol for the heart. Here are just a few of the meanings: virtue, shame, forgiveness, joy, sorrow, respect, rudeness, despair, laziness, ability, resentment, panic, worry, mercy, patience, doubt, and loyalty. Notice that all of the words do not conform to what we normally consider to be socially acceptable and positive feelings. Some of these feelings are very uncomfortable. However, they all are feelings and emotions from our life experience. Perhaps learning and teaching from the heart involves being genuinely human and involves the full range of our emotions and feelings. Passionate teaching involves a roler-coaster ride of up and down feelings. That's just the way it is.

It's not easy to teach from the heart because people sometimes hesitate to teach what they are passionate about or to show their emotions. What if our passions don't seem to fit into the prescribed curriculum? What if we think something is important and others don't? What if we think that students shouldn't become our friends or that we shouldn't show them our feelings? Teaching and learning from the heart can be controversial. That's one reason Project WILD and Project Learning Tree recommend "teaching students how to think, not what to think". I could never accept this simplistic advice, because I believe good teachers care about the "what" as well as the "how" of the curriculum. Teaching students that environmental quality is threatened by people who don't have and practice a land ethic is an important "what" to teach. Fear of criticism prevents some schools from giving teachers permission to teach their passions in feeling ways. When we don't teach from the heart, we lose much of our power and vitality. We paint the picture to our students that we are objective, emotionless, robots who don't care much about anything. Students know that they feel deeply about many things and when teachers don't show their feelings, the students become confused and alienated. When they feel that we are significantly different from them, teaching becomes more difficult. When we teach from the heart, we are showing more of our humanness. Outdoor and environmental education programs have always stressed the

wholeness of knowledge and the person. It has also focused on the importance of social and emotional growth in students.

There are dangers in dividing humans into pieces and labeling their hearts, heads, hands, souls, and spirits. Historically, schools have viewed students largely as heads and hands. Usually, they have honored only their minds through the academic curriculum and their bodies through competitive sports. Most public schools only give token recognition to students' hearts, souls, and spirits, although that is changing. Brain-based and constructivist teaching are leading us closer to teaching and learning from the heart. Recent book titles from The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) are encouraging: Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community (1996); Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators (1997); Rethinking Educational Change with Heart and Mind (1997); Marching to Different Drummers (2nd Ed. 1998); The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners (1999); and The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School (2000).

William Glasser believes that we are motivated by five basic inborn needs: survival, love, power, fun, and freedom (1992, p. 43). When we teach from the heart, we need to attend to these basic needs in our students. Notice that none of these basic needs includes the subjects usually included in the school curriculum. Many outdoor and environmental education programs address these needs of students through approaching subject matter in creative ways. John Dewey, a turn-of-the century philosopher and progressive educator, has influenced many of us in this field, whether we know it or not. The idea of the Progressive Education movement was to begin with the interests and concerns emerging from student experiences in order to progress toward the subject matter which could help to bring meaning to these experiences. Dewey wrote in Experience and Education: "What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur" (1938, p. 49). I think Dewey used the word, "soul" to mean "heart".

To fully understand the meaning of heart in rational terms, may not be possible. When we use words such as intuition, respect, compassion, love, soul, and spirit, we approach mystical and magical

territory. These words have many meanings to people. There are still many mysteries that science can't solve -- and maybe never will. For example, scientists have recently identified a sub-atomic particle called the Higgs boson or "God particle". It is believed to account for the mass of all matter in the universe, but they haven't been able to find it yet. Physicists believe it exists because their best theories predict it. In fact, the theories would fall apart without it (Gannett News Service, Rockford Register Star, January 16, 2000, p. 2A). Maybe teaching and learning from the heart is like that -- we just "know" it exists because of our theories about being human, but we haven't found out how to explain it yet.

As I prepared these stories of the heart for you, I read many books and articles. One of my favorite books is Parker Palmer's The Courage To Teach (1998). One question he raises is: Who is the self that teaches? To find the answer we must look within ourselves and travel three paths of our innerlandscape -- the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual (p. 4). What we find on this inner quest determines how we relate to our students. Palmer defines spiritual as ". . . the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life . . . " (p. 5). As outdoor educators, we also look to the outer landscape of nature and human nature. How we view the relationship of humans to non-human nature is very important. I have thought a lot about the different images of nature we hold. If we view nature as unrelated to human nature, we may be following a rapid path to extinction. Nature stimulates my intellect when I wonder where the monarch butterfly goes when it leaves Illinois. It stimulates my emotions when I marvel at its beauty, and it stimulates my heart when I try to understand how the butterfly is part of me and I am part of the butterfly. Palmer believes that schools should support and nurture a teacher's inner life, who, in turn, is responsible for supporting and nurturing the students' inner lives. He believes that good teachers are weavers of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students. He writes: "The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods, but in their hearts -- meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self" (p. 11).

During the 1970s, when I was in crisis and really searching for my inner self, I went on many personal growth adventures by taking workshops in re-evaluation counseling, gestalt therapy, transactional analysis, and values clarification. I didn't know it at the time, but I was really searching for my heart and preparing for the future. I finally found it buried deep inside and became a better person and teacher. Then, I was fortunate to be able to use some of what I learned by co-directing my own camp in the Adirondack Mountains of New York.

The Human Relations Youth Adventure Camp provided many opportunities to experiment with ways to learn and teach from the heart. The program was based on building community: trust, caring, respect for self and others, cooperation, opportunities for decision making, group problem solving, and conflict resolution (Knapp and Goodman, 1981, pp. 183-184). While living in a wilderness setting, we explored the inner mindscape of our hearts and the outer landscape of nature. The camp nurtured my interests in indigenous cultures, values education, adventure challenges, reflecting on experiences, and using nature and human nature activities to build learning communities.

Another influential book is Freedom to Learn by Carl Rogers and H. Jerome Freiberg (1994). They state that "the primary task of the teacher is to permit the student to learn, to feed his or her own curiosity" (p. 34). They raise a difficult question: "How can a teacher be creative in facilitating a student's learning -- and love of learning" (p. 34)? They want students in schools to say:

"No, no, that's not what I want. Wait! This is closer to what I'm interested in, what I need. Oh, here it is! Now I'm grasping and comprehending what I need and what I want to know" (p. 35).

By now you understand why teaching and learning from the heart is a complex idea -- especially in the present climate of public education. Many schools have forgotten about the learner's heart. High-stakes testing, inflexible learning standards, prescribed textbooks, lockstep movement through an imposed curriculum, unresponsiveness to diverse learning styles, a heavy emphasis on computer technologies, and other characteristics of modern schooling do not respect learners, especially when outdoor and community-based learning activities are sacrificed. Many writers have acknowledged that educators are not in charge of what happens in most public schools today (Rose, p. 338). The corporate leaders and politicians are. Perhaps outdoor and environmental educators can enlighten the public and lead the way to a saner way of teaching and learning. Historically, leaders in our field have promoted school reform when they were dissatisfied with the quality of educational practice. We can do the same today. Teaching from the heart involves thinking and acting with feeling and emotion. As outdoor and environmental educators, we can plan lessons directed to the whole student's heart -- where their intellect, feeling, body, and spirit converge. If we begin with the joy and excitement of discovery, the other academic objectives will result. Rachel Carson said it this way: "Once the emotions have been aroused --- a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love -- then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning" (1956, p. 45).

Susan Smith outlines six ways of knowing: the rational mind, the creative mind, the heart, the body, dreams, and the spirit (Smith, Willms, and Johnson, 1997, pp. 223-225). She defines the heartfelt way of knowing as the capacity to feel. Emotions can affect learning both negatively or positively, depending on what they are. For example, we usually avoid what is accompanied by fear and seek out experiences that are accompanied by joy. Smith calls for balancing and integrating all these ways of knowing.

When we look to indigenous knowledge for the meaning of "heart", we find a broad concept. Greg Cajete (1994), a Tewa Indian from New Mexico, explains the metaphor of the Hunter of Good Heart. This universal and ancient symbol of hunting cultures represents the understanding of the sacredness of Nature, especially as it relates to humans and the animals they hunted. Among the Pueblo people of the Southwest, the Hunter of Good Heart represented a way of living, a way of relating, a way of ethics and proper behavior" (p. 96). This metaphor symbolizes an indigenous teaching and learning process that begins in childhood and extends to old age (p. 97). To reach this individual state of completeness where the hunter's spirit merged with the animal's and the whole world, represents a life goal. The act of hunting also perpetuates the lives of the family, clan and community. Hunting was the foundation for teaching and learning ecological relationships. The first step in preparing to hunt was to develop the hunter's heart through learning about the spirits and nature (p. 62). Although many people do not hunt today by killing animals directly, hunting is a metaphor for searching for knowledge for how to live a better life. The good hunter, like the good teacher, is attentive to the moment, integrates action, being, and thinking, has a sense for the concentric rings of relationship, and shows humility (p. 60).

According to the Aztecs of Mexico, the ideal purpose of education was to find one's face, find one's heart, and search for a foundation. Finding face meant developing and expressing your innate character and potential, finding heart meant searching out and expressing your inner passion, and exploring foundation meant finding the vocation that allowed you the fullest expression of self and truth (Cajete, 1994, p. 35). In our teaching do we devote equal time to all three of these goals? Do we help our students find and share their inner passions? If not, we are not teaching from the heart according to the ancient Aztecs and many indigenous people living today. Traditional indigenous or land-based people know what teaching and learning from the heart is because they live their lives from a spiritual perspective. We have much to learn from them.

I would like to close with some of my favorite quotations about the heart:

"Teaching from the heart means teaching from the depths of who we are with the hope that we will touch the hearts of those with whom we work. (Jerold W. Apps, Teaching From the Heart)

"We become teachers for reasons of the heart. But many of us lose heart as time goes by. How can we take heart, alone and together, so we can give heart to our students and our world -- which is what good teachers do." (Parker Palmer, The Courage To Teach: A Guide for Reflection and Renewal)

"Good discipline is a series of little victories in which a teacher, through small decencies, reaches a child's heart." (Haim Ginott)

"They go forth with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts. An undeveloped heart -- not a cold one. The difference is important. (E. M. Forster)

"Occasionally in life there are moments of unutterable fulfillment which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words. Their meanings can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

"Nature lore is a mixture of love and knowledge, and it comes more by way of the heart than of the head." (John Burroughs, With John Burroughs in Field and Woods)

"The ecological conscience . . . is an affair of the mind as well as the heart. It implies a capacity to study and learn, as well as to emote about the problems of conservation" (Aldo Leopold, River The Mother of God)

"After a bow and drill fire-making demonstration by Ernest Thompson Seton, and observer said, 'I don't see why you go to all that trouble when you only have to scratch a match,' Seton replied, 'Ah! You are thinking only of the fire down there (pointing to the board). I'm also thinking of the fire up here,' and he placed his hand over his heart " (quoted in Harlow, 1986, p. 68).

"Rather than requiring all teachers to teach environmental education, I would rather give teachers the freedom to teach from their hearts and give parents the freedom to choose the teaching approach they want for their children." (Paul Krapfel in Smith & Williams' Ecological Education in Action p. 61)

"Hymeyohst Storm teaches that the central fire represents the human heart and its potential for innocence. We often set three simple rules for council: speak honestly, be brief, and listen from the heart." (Jack Zimmerman & Virginia Coyle, "Council: Reviving the Art of Listening")

"Life is short and we never have enough time for gladdening the hearts of those who travel the way with us. O, be swift to love! Make haste to be kind." (Henri F. Amiel)

"We only understand what we love." (Goethe)

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